

In Pursuit of the Perfect Finish

01/08/21 Gary Mrozek

At our December Zoom meeting, many different finishes were discussed. They included mixing Zinsser Seal Coat (dewaxed shellac) and boiled linseed oil at a ratio of 50/50. This has been John Caye's tried and true wipe-on finish for 30+ years. It's easy to use and reasonably priced (approx. \$11 per quart) and all ingredients available locally. John uses as a "once and done" finish as well as a base coat for top finishes such as lacquer. He suggested purchasing an inexpensive squirt bottle, such as used for Ketchup, mustard or salad dressing. This makes for easy application on the lathe. I also shared my favorite finish, Waterlox Original. The drawback of this finish is, to my knowledge, it's not available locally. It runs from \$32 a quart to \$85 per gallon. It's the best product I found if you like to buff out the finish when dry. This is David Ellsworth's main finish. He applies it straight from the can and buffs with Tripoli followed by a clean white linen buff wheel to remove the residue from the surface of your object. I also shared a formula that Mike Mahoney offered during a Zoom meeting earlier this fall. He mixes 1/3 boiled linseed oil, 1/3 Polyurethane and 1/3 Odorless Mineral Spirits. I tried this with some questionable results. First, it's very thin and penetrates deep into the wood. This could be considered a good thing. I didn't catch how Mike applies his. I brushed mine on. The first bowl of soft maple, it worked pretty well. It sealed the wood, but really didn't have a finish. I next tried it on an Elm bowl by applying a heavy brushed coat and wiping off the excess after a few minutes. That seemed better. Then I tried a walnut bowl by brushing it on and leaving it sit overnight. In the morning I found that I had some puddling in the bottom of the bowl that was still tacky. I also found some finish had formed a drip on the underside base of the bowl. This too was still tacky and when I whipped it off, the finish came off down to the bare wood. My conclusion this is best used as a wipe on finish with (X) coats to achieve a finish. I then decided to make some modifications to Mike's blend. Rather than using urethane, I opted for a true Alkyd resin varnish. This is the stuff that was used before polyurethane (plastic) cornered the market. For years, fine woodworker's swore by Pratt and Lampert 38. Unfortunately, they're no longer making it. I did find an equivalent at Hirschfield Paint in St. Cloud; Old Masters Super Varnish. I wanted to make a small amount and opted to use an old 16oz plastic Coke bottle. I wanted to stick with Mike's ratio, so I used a 2/3 (5.333 oz.) measuring cup. I mixed 2/3c Boiled Linseed Oil, 2/3c Old Masters Super Varnish (I used Satin) and 2/3c odorless mineral spirits. The final ingredient that I added

was 1tbls (1/2oz) of Japan Drier, also sold at Hirschfield's. My source at Hirschfield's and online research said that adding mineral spirits to varnish, paint and oils dilutes the drying agents that the manufactures had formulated for their original formulas. Cost breakdown; varnish \$18 qt., Linseed Oils \$6 qt., Mineral Spirits \$9 gallon and Japan Dryer \$6. That makes this product \$16 for a working quart of product, 1/2 the price of Waterlox.

I tried it as a wipe-on friction finish on the lathe and it worked great. I turned the rmp's up and buffed it in and it worked great. I brushed it on and wiped off after a few minutes and it worked good but needs a second coat to my liking. It appeared to be dry in about an hour. Other tests to be tried will include:•Hours until a white powered dust and no plugged sandpaper between coats is achieved•Buff ability•Odor/fume levels in the shop•Shelf life before jelling in the container•The "wife" test...does it meet a potential buyers approval•A day or two in the sun•A day in the cold •other I'll continue to run it through its paces and report back accordingly. If anyone is interested in joining me in this journey by trying a sample, I'll share it if you'll give your honest feedback. Feel free to contact me direct at gary@treesremembered.com or (320) 250-1277.

Caution: With the high volume of linseed oil and the added driers, be sure to take spontaneous combustion precautions when disposing of used towels and rag

